

States: Making Change

With big gaps in the federal government's ability to protect people from environmental contaminants, people are getting organized to change state policies and programs across the country. Below are highlights of some of the recent victories on state environmental health legislation.

For a more complete listing of state laws related to health and the environment, go to The National Conference of State Legislatures (www.ncsl.org/programs/environ/envhealth/cehdb.htm).

● Mercury

THE PROBLEM

Mercury can impact brain development, and it is especially harmful to a developing fetus or young child. Exposure to mercury is associated with reduced IQ, impaired memory and speech and learning disabilities in children.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Many states have taken steps to reduce mercury exposure by regulating emissions at coal-burning power plants, banning sales of products containing mercury (such as thermometers or blood pressure measuring devices) or requiring recycling or controlled disposal of products that contain mercury (such as electronics or switches in cars). All but the following states have mercury policies: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, South Dakota and West Virginia.

To learn more, see the Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/mercury/laws.htm.

● Pesticide Use in Schools

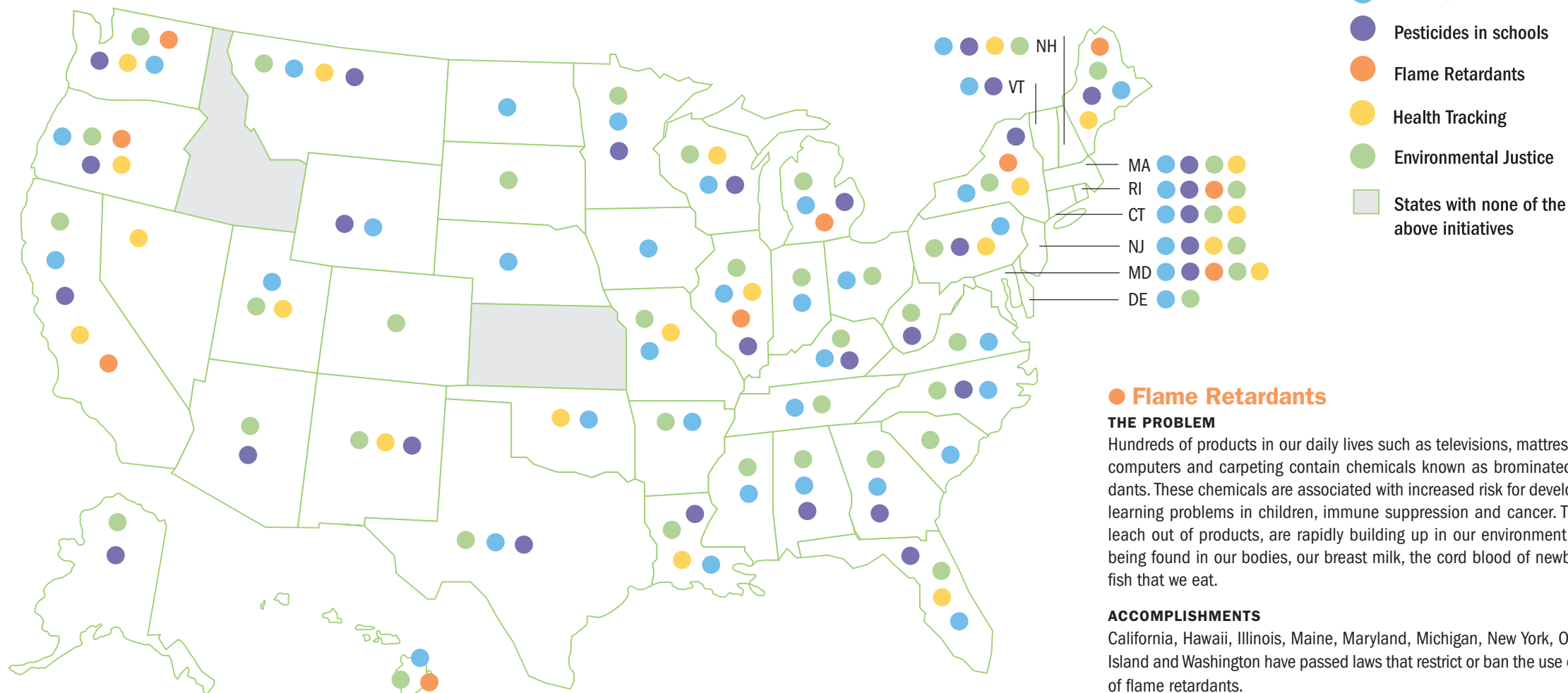
THE PROBLEM

Many schools across the country use harmful pesticides inside and outside where children can be exposed to them. Pesticides may increase risk for a wide range of health concerns, such as cancer or learning disabilities.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Some states are taking precautionary measures to reduce or eliminate children's exposure to pesticides at school, either by banning some of the more dangerous pesticides or requiring sign posting or parental notification if any of the school premises have been sprayed. Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming have all passed related laws.

To learn more, see Beyond Pesticides www.beyondpesticides.org/schools/schoolpolicies/index.htm.



● Environmental Justice

THE PROBLEM

Low-income people and people of color tend to bear the heaviest burden from exposure to environmental contaminants because they often live near hazardous waste sites or polluting industries.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Many states have laws or initiatives promoting environmental justice (which is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies). These initiatives include guidelines for better public participation in decision making, staff trainings in environmental justice and other programs.

All states have established some sort of environmental justice initiative except Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Vermont and Wyoming.

To learn more, see Environmental Justice For All: A Fifty-State Survey of Legislation, Policies and Initiatives www.abanet.org/irr/committees/environmental/statestudy.pdf.

● Health Tracking

THE PROBLEM

Currently, there is no established national system to track people's exposure to environmental contaminants and related health effects. If this information were collected, governments could plan actions to prevent environment-related diseases. Without this data, it is difficult to get an accurate sense of how many people are affected by health conditions associated with environmental exposures and how to prioritize policy changes.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The following states received grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to plan or establish health tracking systems: California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin.

To learn more see the CDC's website: www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking.

● Flame Retardants

THE PROBLEM

Hundreds of products in our daily lives such as televisions, mattresses, furniture, computers and carpeting contain chemicals known as brominated flame retardants. These chemicals are associated with increased risk for developmental and learning problems in children, immune suppression and cancer. The chemicals leach out of products, are rapidly building up in our environment and are now being found in our bodies, our breast milk, the cord blood of newborns and the fish that we eat.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

California, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island and Washington have passed laws that restrict or ban the use of some kinds of flame retardants.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

People in states across the country are organizing for safer cosmetics, safer baby products, bans on mercury and flame retardants and other important laws. Get involved with organizations leading these efforts. Some examples include:

- **In California—Breast Cancer Fund:** www.breastcancerfund.org
- **In Maine—The Alliance for a Healthy Maine:** www.preventharm.org/camp.part.shtml
- **In Massachusetts—The Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow:** www.healthytomorrow.org
- **In Minnesota—The Healthy Legacy Coalition:** www.healthylegacy.org
- **In Montana—Women's Voices for the Earth:** www.womenandenvironment.org
- **In Oregon—Rachel's Friends Breast Cancer Coalition** www.rachelsfriends.org
- **In Washington—Toxic Free Legacy Coalition:** www.toxicfreelegacy.org

